

“I have a **condition** that doesn't generally affect my **ability** to do this job.

But you're going to **think** it does.”

## The Ability in Disability: The experiences of Canadians with disabilities who pursue coaching roles

### RELEVANCE

Ensuring that pathways into coaching are accessible to all is an important step in creating a truly inclusive Canadian sport system. Yet overwhelmingly the existing research on sport and people with disabilities has focused on their roles as 'athletes' and 'participants' and overlooked other ways individuals can participate in and contribute to sport.

### RESEARCH AIMS

**#1:** To provide novel insights into the experiences of Canadian with disabilities who are pursuing work as coaches (paid and unpaid).

**#2:** To develop recommendations that would make coaching more widely accessible to and inclusive of Canadians with disabilities.

### METHODS

**14 semi-structured qualitative interviews** were conducted with individuals who self-identified as having a disability and who are currently involved in sport coaching. The transcripts were **thematically analyzed** using inductive and deductive codes.

### Participants were coaching in the following sport

- Alpine Skiing (4)
- Nordic Skiing (2)
- Para-ice hockey (1)
- Swimming (3)
- Triathlon (1)
- Wheelchair basketball (3)



### They self identified as having impairments

- Acquired (10) – spinal cord injury, limb deficiency, traumatic brain injury
- Congenital (4) – visual impairment, limb deficiency, neurological condition

Three individuals were working 'full-time' as coaches (their primary source of income was coaching). Others were involved in formal and informal roles. They were mostly although not exclusively coaching in para-sport programs.

### FINDINGS

**F#1:** Participants spoke about different forms of 'expertise' needed to coach. As people with disabilities they were perceived to have expertise in disability but not expertise in coaching.

*Example: One participant was frequently asked to 'lead' workshops for others to learn how to coach athletes with disabilities. She later had to petition for a special exemption to take the course herself because it was assumed someone with a visual impairment could not coach.*

**F#2:** There was an assumption that people with disabilities could only coach in para-sport and adaptive programs but 'able-bodied' coaches could coach anyone.

*Quote: "I'm a skier. I don't consider myself a sit skier, but if you ask me how I get down the mountain I'd say I use a sit ski. But I'm a skier. I look at the terrain very similar as I did prior to my injury and taking on the sit ski. I would love to be able to serve any child, any kid that's wanting to learn a little bit... I would love to be in a position where I can offer my services and my 20 years of accumulated experience in the sport to anybody."*

**CONCLUSIONS:** We expected to find a lot of 'structural barriers' and instead we found 'attitudinal barriers.' Many assumptions were made about **who could coach** and about **who could coach whom**. Conditions that supported the involvement of coaches with disabilities were those that recognized the 'expertise' that comes from lived experience while providing opportunities to develop coaching competencies and for professional development.

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